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EDITORIALS.

WE have frequently complained in these columns of the exclusive conduct of scientific enterprises by persons not acquainted with the sciences and not engaged in their pursuit. We will not enumerate the blunders committed by such persons under such circumstances, as they have recently come under our observation; but only refer now to a question of taste in which some of these well meaning persons have immortalized themselves in stone. A new building for the use of the collections of the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia was recently erected, chiefly from money appropriated by the Legislature of Pennsylvania. An entrance doorway was devised, and in order that it should represent the uses of the building, it was adorned with figures and reliefs of animals. Persons possessed of the least spark of originality would have seen the propriety of representing in these figures something appropriate to the country, and if possible the institution. Nothing would have been easier than to have placed at the entrance of the Museum, figures of some of the forms of life discovered by its members. The idea was suggested to the gentlemen in charge of the construction, but to commemorate in so conspicuous a manner the services of the naturalists of the Academy it did not strike them favorably. So it came that the apex of the entrance was surmounted by, not even an African lion, but an official British lion, with his mane brushed into a collar like Punch's dog, such as one sees on Government buildings in Great Britain. On each side is a lioness similar to those seen on buildings all over the world. At the summit of one lateral column is a head of a hound, and on the other side a ram with very unsymmetrical horns, both foreign importations. Of the animals in relief above the door, the only American animal is a crab, *Lupa diacantha*, which is indeed, very appropriate to the building commission, as it generally goes backwards, and pinches its nearest neighbors.

—WHEN the natural sciences are taught in our public schools, there will be fewer absurd and untrue stories published in the newspapers. Thus a recent Philadelphia paper tells of a man in Arizona who had two *Helodermas* ("Gila monsters"), each three feet in length, which acted as watch-dogs for him, and which killed a would-be assassin who entered his house at night. From New York comes a story of a physi-

cian who fed his guests with cholera bacilli, and thus caused their deaths. This doctor is said to reside in Buenos Ayres, and his name is given. A New York paper publishes a reporter's interview with the Governor of Illinois, in which that worthy is made to say that he is afflicted with locomotor ataxia. According to the Governor, the interview never took place. Here inaccuracy has passed into mendacity, as in the case of the *New York World's* interview with the astronomer Secchi, which were shown to have been pure inventions. One of the editors of this journal thought he would investigate the source of stories as to the frequent appearance of an alleged ghost on a moor south of Brooklyn last August. These stories had been published in a conspicuous way in several papers of New York and Brooklyn for several weeks, and it seemed worth while to look into a matter which they published as serious news. Nothing was seen, however, but a few young men, among whom were reporters of the *Brooklyn Eagle*, the *New York Sun*, and the *New York World*. The last-named confessed to having himself filled the rôle of ghost on one night by using newspapers, so that this ghost, like most others, appears to have been of a purely subjective origin on the part of one newspaper at least.

—LIEUTENANT PEARY'S party has returned, leaving him to prosecute his researches with only two companions. The results to geography are not great, as he was compelled to abandon the expedition to the northeast coast of Greenland, owing to extreme severity of the weather. Some of the men who have returned, have been talking in a way which shows that they are not adapted for service on an exploring expedition, and Lieutenant Peary is, apparently, well rid of them. It is hoped that the next season will be more propitious. We express here our regret that the Academy of Natural Sciences of this city has not continued to interest itself officially in this important enterprise, as it did in the beginning.

—AN artificial taste or custom has often interfered with healthy natural processes in human affairs. The follies of human fashions are innumerable. We refer now to one of minor importance, and yet one which well illustrates the proposition—that is, the alleged fattening of oysters for the market: The nearer the habitat of an oyster approaches salt water, the better will its flavor be, as, for example, the Blue Points of Long Island Sound, the Chincoteagues of the Maryland Coast, the Norfolks of Virginia and the Baratarias of Louisiana. These oysters all have, in the natural state, a brownish or yellowish tint, which, to the connoisseur, is a sure indication of their superior merits. Here,

however, the perversity of an artificial taste enters. Many people must have them white. Such persons prefer a comparatively fresh water oyster, as the Maurice River Coves of the Delaware and those of the upper Chesapeake. Also, if they are not fat they must be made so. To accomplish these two most undesirable ends, the oysters are supplied with fresh water so gradually as not to kill them immediately. They lose the russet tint of health if they have it, and become swelled up by endosmosis. Their flavor is destroyed and is replaced by one that strongly reminds one of that of the leucomaines produced in the stomach by indigestion. The oysters are thoroughly sickened, and in this state are sold and eaten in large numbers by multitudes who do not know the flavor of that most excellent mollusc, a healthy salt water *Ostrea virginica*.

—THIS year was very wet during the spring in the Eastern States, and this period was followed by one of the severest draughts known in our history, which is now, fortunately, broken. The heat of the summer was nearly or quite equal to that of 1876. Whether these peculiar conditions be the cause or not, the scarcity in the same region of batrachians, reptiles and birds during the past season has been exceptional.